



As Production Coordination manager at Idaho National Laboratory's Materials and Fuels Complex, Keith Powers coordinates schedules weeks in advance while making the final decision about what work actually gets done.

Powers keeps things running at Materials and Fuels Complex

By [Cathy Koon](#), for INL Nuclear Science & Technology Communications

Keith Powers says his decision to join the nuclear Navy as a young man in Washington state "was a very fortunate thing."

Today, as Production Coordination manager at Idaho National Laboratory's [Materials and Fuels Complex](#), Powers can look back at the career path that led him directly to his job: Setting priorities for the work to be done at the complex. He is responsible for the "plan of the day," deciding which project and craft work will be done at the laboratories and [hot cells](#) in 14 facilities within the MFC. He integrates all the schedules and operations.

He compares it to running a three-ring circus. He has to keep any eye on what work will be coming in over the months to come, coordinating schedules and juggling plans for the next six weeks, and making the final decision about what work actually gets done.

"I don't try to formalize schedules further than two weeks," he says.

Then when, not if, something goes wrong, something breaks down, it's ultimately up to him to figure out how to reroute or reschedule the work. Powers doesn't work alone in his high-wire balancing act, but he says when the hard decisions have to be made, he does it.

Powers has high praise for the people who work for and with him. He oversees six production coordinators who interface directly with the facilities to make sure they have the "right paper, the right people and the right parts to get the job done."

"The best part of the job is the satisfaction of getting the assigned work done," he says. He credits "great people who are self-starters" for making his work possible. "I have a great work staff," he says.



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Powers outside of MFC where Nuclear Science and Technology, Operations and Homeland Security are housed.

Nuclear Science and Technology, Operations, and Homeland Security are all housed at MFC. The production and technology team made of up managers from the three areas meets once a week to review what work needs to be done.

Production Control is a new department, organized when Argonne National Laboratory-West became INL's MFC. Powers had been exposed to "every facility out here" before being assigned as production coordinator manager. His experience and familiarity with the various programs put him in good stead for the new position.

When Powers joined the nuclear Navy, he trained at INL. In 1980, Argonne hired him right out of the Navy. He attended night school to complete his degree in business management, and worked his way through the Argonne facilities. Today, he uses that experience to do his job.

In a perfect world, he says, all the work would get done right on schedule, "but it's not a perfect world, and we are always a little short somewhere." As in any business, the powers-that-be oversell the product.

"It's better to be too busy than not busy enough," Powers says. And things break down. "We are dealing with old facilities," he points out.

So what does he do to relieve the job stress? Normally, he runs. However, because of a knee injury, he had to take off the past year to let it heal. He looks forward to being able to compete once again in marathons. After spending months in rehabilitation, he's more than ready to begin running again.

His bad knee may have sidelined him off the job, but it didn't keep him from running operations at MFC. There, it is work as usual, doing what he does so well.

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